



News Release

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Easter is around the corner — make it a celebration to remember

Cook, decorate, and hide your eggs right

OLYMPIA — The makings of an egg-cellent Easter feast are just a few simple things Mom always taught you — starting with the basic rule — wash your hands.

This may be the most popular time of year for eggs — they're used for many holiday meals and family fun activities. Like all perishable foods — meat, poultry, seafood, fruits, and veggies — eggs must be handled, cooked, and stored properly to prevent foodborne illness.

Hard-boiled eggs are popular for Easter egg hunts. Proper egg cooking, handling, and temperature control can keep your kids from getting sick. Wash your hands and throw away eggs that are cracked or dirty. Place a single layer of eggs in a pan, add water to at least one inch above the eggs, and cover. Bring the water to a boil. Keep the eggs in the covered pan until finished cooking, remove the pan from the heat, and run cold water over them until they're cool enough to handle. Place the eggs in an uncovered container in the refrigerator so they can air-dry.

Before decorating eggs with your family, wash your hands. Use food-grade dyes, such as store-bought egg dyes, liquid food coloring, or fruit-drink powders to color eggs that will be eaten. A good idea is to buy one set of eggs for decorating and another set for eating. All eggs left at room temperature more than two hours should not be eaten. Use them for decoration only.

If an Easter egg hunt is part of your family tradition be sure to hide boiled eggs in clean, cool places. It's important to keep them protected from sunlight, dirt, pets, and damage. If you plan to eat the eggs later, the total time for hiding and hunting eggs shouldn't be more than two hours. For safety, consider hiding plastic eggs in the yard and saving the real eggs in the refrigerator.

Keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold is another way to reduce the chance of foodborne illness. Ham is a popular main course for Easter dinner. Like other meat dishes, ham must be

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cooked to a high-enough temperature to keep illness at bay. Pork products should be cooked to at least 160 °F. [Use a food thermometer to make sure food is cooked thoroughly](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/food/safetytips.html) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/food/safetytips.html). Side dishes that need to be refrigerated shouldn't sit out for more than two hours. Place leftovers in shallow containers and refrigerate immediately. Thoroughly reheat leftovers to 165° F.

Hand washing can prevent illness in ways beyond food safety. If you plan to have [chicks and ducklings at an Easter celebration supervise children carefully](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/Ts/Zoo/salmonellachick.html) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/Ts/Zoo/salmonellachick.html) if they're handling these animals and make sure they wash their hands. Kids under five should never handle chicks or other young birds. This group, along with people over 50 and those with weakened immune systems, is most likely to get sick from *Salmonella* bacteria that these birds may carry.

Anyone who touches a chick or duckling or its environment should wash their hands right away. Birds should also be kept away from foods and drinks. [Infection with Salmonella bacteria](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphi/factsheet/salmonel.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphi/factsheet/salmonel.htm) may cause diarrhea, fever, stomach pain, nausea, and vomiting. Symptoms usually last several days. Severe cases may require hospitalization and can occasionally result in death.

Following these tips will help ensure you and your family have a safe and healthy Easter season.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
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